

headway, and do you think that the next summit is going to concentrate more on that than the FTAA?

President Clinton. Well, I think the answer to your question is it depends in large measure on what we do here. Since the United States did not renew fast-track authority, there was not much more we could do. But a lot of progress has been made within South America, for example. Chile reached an agreement with the MERCOSUR countries, and a lot of other things have been going on there. And then we've been working on some specific issues with a lot of nations in our hemisphere.

But I believe that our ability to get a free trade area of the Americas—Chile also, I think, made separate agreements with both Canada and Mexico. So our ability to get a free trade area of the Americas and to build what I think is potentially the most powerful economic unit in the early part of the next century now rests

with the willingness of Congress to approve the fast-track authority and our ability to get back on track and try to be a constructive, cooperative part of this process. And I intend to do whatever I can to achieve that.

And as I said, I'm delighted that the President is going to address Congress tomorrow. There's an enormous amount of admiration for Chile in the United States Congress, across party lines, for all kinds of reasons. And I think his words will be heard, and I think they will be exceedingly helpful.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 136th news conference began at 1:16 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to the President's Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses (PAC). President Frei spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Memorandum on Gulf War Documents February 26, 1997

*Memorandum for the Chairperson of the
Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War
Veterans' Illnesses*

Subject: Gulf War Documents

I've made it very clear from the early days of my Administration that the welfare of Gulf War veterans is a national priority. My strong and continuing commitment, reflected in the establishment and recent extension of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses, is to leave no stone unturned on behalf of those who served in the Persian Gulf theater. This commitment entails ensuring both that sick Gulf War veterans receive the medical care they require and that all relevant information that may help us understand the risks they faced is brought to light.

As you are aware, the Central Intelligence Agency, working in cooperation with the Department of Defense, has recently declassified several documents relating to the ongoing investigation of possible chemical warfare agent exposure of U.S. forces during demolition operations at Khamisiyah after the Gulf War. These docu-

ments indicate that: (1) U.S. Army units were warned of the possibility that there were chemical munitions at the Khamisiyah ammunition depot prior to seizing that objective during the ground war in February 1991; and (2) in November 1991, the Central Intelligence Agency prepared a classified message documenting the possibility that U.S. forces conducting demolition operations at the Khamisiyah facility were exposed to chemical warfare agents.

While the many issues related to Gulf War illnesses are complex and entail consideration of massive quantities of information, there must be no question of this Nation's commitment to protecting its soldiers on the battlefield and then ensuring that they receive the care they require upon returning home. This is a joint bipartisan responsibility that my Administration and the Congress take very seriously.

Accordingly, in conducting your oversight of the ongoing investigation being undertaken by the Department of Defense, with the assistance of other executive departments and agencies, into possible chemical or biological agent exposures during the Gulf War, I am directing your

Feb. 26 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1997

attention to the recently declassified documents. You have a vital role in assisting me, the Congress, and the American public in understanding their full significance.

These documents have been provided to the Inspectors General of the United States Army and the Central Intelligence Agency, both of whom are conducting investigations relating to Khamisiyah. There are two important questions raised by these recently declassified documents that must be resolved by these investigations: (1) When did we have sufficient evidence to conclude that chemical munitions were present at Khamisiyah and that U.S. forces conducting demolition activities may have been exposed to chemical warfare agents; and (2) Once we had that information, what actions were taken by whom to investigate this alarming possibility and were those actions sufficient.

Your oversight efforts should take full account of the evidence disclosed by these ongoing investigations, as well as the information being developed by the Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses at the Department of Defense. Your preliminary assessment relating to the adequacy of the investigations concerning these issues should be provided as soon as possible within the next 60 days, and no later than April 30, 1997, the date specified in Executive Order 13034 for your interim status report.

Thank you for your continuing efforts and those of your fellow members and supporting staff. Your Committee's dedicated efforts are truly indispensable to ensuring that no stone is left unturned on behalf of Gulf War veterans.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Statement on Senate Action on the Balanced Budget Amendment *February 26, 1997*

I have made clear my concerns about the balanced budget amendment, and I am pleased that Senator Torricelli has made the difficult decision to oppose that measure.

Now it's time to get down to the hard work of balancing the budget. I look forward to work-

ing with both Republicans and Democrats in Congress to enact a plan that balances the budget in 5 years while protecting education and other critical investments in America's future.

Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on Weapons of Mass Destruction *February 26, 1997*

To the Congress of the United States:

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997 (Public Law 104-201), title XIV, section 1411 requires the President to transmit a report to the Congress that assesses the capabilities of the Federal Government to prevent and respond to terrorist incidents involving weapons of mass destruction and to support

State and local prevention and response efforts. In accordance with this provision, I transmit the attached report on the subject issue.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
February 26, 1997.